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1982



Miss DeCourcy



A
Drama
in
Four
Acts,

By
Graham
Ashmead.

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Miss DeCourcy,



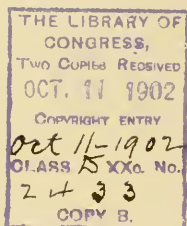
A Drama in Four Acts,



BY

Graham Ashmead.

FS 6501
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1902



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Am. R., June 9, 1924

Dramatis Personæ.

ELEANOR (DOLLY) DECOURCY, *heiress to a fortune.*

MAUD FORRESTER, *engaged to Walter Campbell.*

MADGE SPENCER (CRAWFORD), *Amos Dean's grandchild.*

AUNT SALLIE DILLARD, *spinster.*

RACHEL MEADOWS, *spinster.*

FRANK LLOYD ELDRIDGE, *a legatee under conditions.*

WALTER CAMPBELL, *a friend of Eldridge.*

AMOS DEAN, *aged farmer.*

MR. LEX, *lawyer.*

DAN DUNN, *imbecile lover of Madge.*

FARMER.

Miss De Courcy.

ACT I.

[SCENE—Late afternoon in August. "The Cedars," farmhouse of Amos Dean, on left of stage, with porch. The background presents cultivated lands, from which harvest has been gathered. A fence, with gate, runs across stage in rear. A large tree, with seat at base, near gate, and within the inclosure. When curtain rises, Frank Lloyd Eldridge and Walter Campbell have just entered gate.]

CAMPBELL. Frank, it was just touch and go. Had you been one minute later, we would have missed the train. That is so unusual with you, who are always punctiliously punctual, that I could not account for it, nor did I care to speak of the matter in the cars.

ELDRIDGE. I was so amazed by something I learned to-day, that I could be pardoned, I think, for a breach of all rules governing my general conduct.

CAMPBELL. Something amazing?

ELDRIDGE. Yes, and annoying.

CAMPBELL. Is there a woman mixed in the incident?

ELDRIDGE. Two—an old and young maiden, but the eldest is dead.

CAMPBELL. Then the problem is simplified one-half.

ELDRIDGE. Mr. Lex, my counsel, advised me not to decide hastily.

CAMPBELL. Law and a woman—Frank, that is often a ruinous combination for young men. Occasionally that applies to elderly men, if they chance to be rich.

ELDRIDGE. I wish people would not interfere and attempt to arrange marriages for other people.

CAMPBELL. You don't mean a breach of promise?

ELDRIDGE. Nonsense; surely not that.

CAMPBELL. I have to guess. You are so indefinite in your statements. You know I will stand by you.

ELDRIDGE. It is a matter wholly for me to decide. You must have heard that mother's eldest sister, Eleanor Lloyd, died recently.

CAMPBELL. Yes. I heard some curiosity expressed as to the disposition of her estate.

ELDRIDGE. I really did not know that Aunt Eleanor had any considerable estate. Her will was not to be read until six months after her funeral. Things continued just as she left them until now. Her will was opened and read to-day.

CAMPBELL. I trust the old lady remembered you handsomely.

ELDRIDGE. That depends. Let me tell you something of her. Sixty odd years ago, Aunt Eleanor, who was then a toddling child, was playing near an open grate, when her clothing caught afire, and before aid reached her, she was severely burned; particularly about the face,

which left frightful, disfiguring scars. That mishap doomed her for the greatest part of her life to isolation. My grandparents gave her superior education at home, for the girl could not endure the unpleasant distinction of her disfigurement.

CAMPBELL. She was indeed to be pitied.

ELDRIDGE. When I was born she quarrelled with father because he refused to call me Zachariah—that was her father's name. My great Aunt Grace, who died childless, made Aunt Eleanor her sole legatee. It seems that her estate, with what Aunt Eleanor received from my grandparents, has increased enormously, until at her death Aunt was worth considerably more than a million.

CAMPBELL. And you are the sole heir?

ELDRIDGE. Had she died intestate. You see she had held herself so aloof from us that I never gave a thought to Aunt's money. Mother, before her death, was exercised because she believed that Eleanor was in straightened circumstances and withheld that fact from her relatives.

CAMPBELL. Thought she had been using the principal, whereas she had invested the income with good judgment.

ELDRIDGE. Exactly. About seventeen years ago a little tot whose mother died soon after her daughter's birth, and whose father, an officer in the army, had been killed in an Indian outbreak in the Dakotas, strayed into Aunt Eleanor's house. The child, instead of being frightened at Aunt's disfigurement, clung to her with demonstrations of affection. The lonely woman, pleased with the girl's attention, became passionately fond of the little one. Finally she gained the consent of Eleanor's grandparents—the tot was named Eleanor also—for the child to live permanently with her. - She lived with Aunt until the old lady's death.

CAMPBELL. Who can wonder that the solitary woman grew to love that child?

ELDRIDGE. I'm glad she did. Well, by her will, Aunt has given one-half of her estate absolutely to Eleanor DeCourcy—that is the girl's full name—when she attains her majority. The remaining half she left to me, coupled, however, with the odd condition that I should make Eleanor DeCourcy my wife on or before her twenty-first birthday. My failure to conform to that condition forfeits my interest in the bequest, which then goes to erect and maintain an asylum for indigent insane single women.

CAMPBELL. There should be no trouble in finding inmates for such an institution.

ELDRIDGE. Walter, leave such jests for the hack writers for comic journals.

CAMPBELL. I'm ashamed of it.

ELDRIDGE. You well know I am far from being a wealthy man, but certain it is I shall do my own courting and selecting my own wife. The chances are that that half million will be sacrificed in the cause of man's individual liberty.

CAMPBELL. Did you visit your Aunt at any time?

ELDRIDGE. Only twice that I remember, and both times I went at her special request. Aunt Eleanor received me in a darkened room, so that I did not see her face distinctly. I found her, however, a well informed woman and a charming conversationalist. I was abroad when she died.

CAMPBELL. You have seen the girl your Aunt willed to you for a wife?

ELDRIDGE. Never. Nor is it likely we shall ever meet. She will be of age in about a year.

CAMPBELL. Then you need not hurry in announcing your final decision.

ELDRIDGE. But it will be the same a year hence as it is to-day.

CAMPBELL. Frank, would it not be the wisest course to see what fate has to offer you before you reject its present proffer? It's a big round sum that is at stake.

ELDRIDGE. That is just what Mr. Lex advises. But don't you understand? I can not deliberately inspect this girl as I could if a horse was offered me under conditions, and if I were not pleased with his points, reject the trade. That would be outrageous. But as I am not compelled to decide at once, probably it would be well to seek our rooms and remove the traces of travel? The ride this afternoon was exceedingly dusty.

CAMPBELL. In that I accept your conclusion without dissent. (*Enter house by porch door.*) (*Enter Maud Forrester and Sally Dillard. Maud carries a book.*)

SALLIE. Miss Maud, I am glad you ran out here to-day without notifying us of your intention. I thought you were to attend Mrs. Remington's reception this evening at the Elms. I imagined Mr. Campbell and you would be present, for the newspapers say it will be the most brilliant society event of this summer.

MAUD. I presume it will. I intend going to the city by an early train to-morrow morning, but at all events I shall not be at the reception this evening.

SALLIE. Then Mr. Campbell will not be there. That is evident.

MAUD. I don't know whether he will or not. For all I care, he can go if he so desires.

SALLIE. Surely you and he have not quarrelled? Your—

MAUD. Yes, our engagement is off, and I'm glad of it. (*Turns and puts handkerchief to her eyes.*)

SALLIE. Miss Maud, I'm sorry. Mr. Campbell appears to be an honorable and courteous gentleman. I am sure he loves you devotedly. Mr. Eldridge, I know, is of that opinion. A tiff, my dear, may drift you apart. Think, Miss Maud, what unhappiness that may mean to you both. I spoiled my life in that way.

MAUD. It would not matter to me. I don't care anything for him. I just think he is horrid.

SALLIE. You are angry. (*Mounts steps of porch.*) What I said was with the best intentions for you both, for I am interested in you both. (*Exit.*)

MAUD. I'm glad she's gone. (*Sits on porch steps.*) If Aunt Sallie Dillard had continued talking of Walter, I should have cried from anger. It isn't because I love Walter Campbell now, for I don't care for him the least bit. (*Walter enters at porch door.*) I don't care for him the least bit in the world.

CAMPBELL. (*Advancing to steps.*) Pardon me, Miss Forrester. I assure you I did not know that you were here. I came rather unexpectedly with Mr. Eldridge for a half day's outing.

MAUD. (*Coolly.*) I rather expected you would attend Mrs. Remington's reception this evening. (*Pause, during which both exhibit embarrassment.*)

CAMPBELL. Your sister, Mrs. Butler, I presume is in good health?

MAUD. Thanks, Mrs. Butler is quite well.

CAMPBELL. And your Aunt, Mrs. Huntingdon?

MAUD. My Aunt's health has been excellent since you last saw her, which, if I mistake not, was yesterday. (*Picks up book; seems to read.*)

CAMPBELL. I do not design to annoy you, Miss Forrester, but some one may notice that we are not conversing, and may speak of it. The opinions of Mrs. Grundy in the country carry more weight with them and are quoted oftener than is the case in cities.

MAUD. This book is quite interesting.

CAMPBELL. Is it Jules Verne's "Topsy-Turvy?" You are holding the volume upside down.

MAUD. (*Tosses book on porch.*) I presume I may do as I please.

CAMPBELL. Certainly. You usually do. Let's talk of something of little moment.

MAUD. Yes, the weather. That is as interesting a topic as any upon which Mr. Campbell and Miss Forrester can converse.

CAMPBELL. Very well. It has been a charming day.

MAUD. Yes, but I fancy it is rather cooler than is usual at this season of the year.

CAMPBELL. Particularly is that noticeable at this time.

MAUD. I did not allude merely to the present moment.

CAMPBELL. No. Do you think we shall have rain to-morrow?

MAUD. I cannot forecast the future. I know that weather, like individuals, can change very quickly.

CAMPBELL. Yes. Yesterday was not so chilly as is to-day.

MAUD. Suppose we confine our remarks more closely to the subject we agreed to discuss; simply in killing time.

CAMPBELL. (*Aside.*) Damn the luck. I had nerved myself to go away jauntingly, but this unexpected meeting with Maud is making hard lines for me. I wish Frank would come. (*Takes letters from pocket, replaces them, but drops a telegram, which Maud covers with her skirts.*) (*Aloud.*) I think, Miss Forrester, to-night a week ago we had much heavy thunder.

MAUD. I do not remember past weather. As with most things that are passed, it lacks interest. Like the sunsets that are no more.

CAMPBELL. I am not sure, but possibly there is a limit to weather as a stimulus to conversation; certainly when the past must be eliminated. I trust to-morrow will be pleasant.

MAUD. I trust so. The patent medicine almanacs, I think, say of the season "Likely to be fair and pleasant." (*Aside.*) I wonder what that telegram is about?

CAMPBELL. I spoke prompted more by desire than from any actual knowledge. I detest making long journeys by rail on rainy days.

MAUD. Oh, you are contemplating a long journey?

CAMPBELL. Why, you see, the firm must send one of its members to San Francisco. If I consent to go, I must wire to-night.

MAUD. Are you going?

CAMPBELL. Very likely to-morrow forenoon. (*Feels in pockets.*) I certainly had that telegram. I don't what I could have done with it. But that is a breach of our understanding. We were to limit our remarks to the weather.

MAUD. I don't care whether it is or not. You were to come to our house to-morrow morning.

CAMPBELL. Pardon me. I think not. I was to send for some articles you decided to retain no longer in your possession.

MAUD. And you are going away for an indefinite time without seeing me?

CAMPBELL. You said you never wanted to see me again. But really, I did not intend to allude to any topic save the weather.

MAUD. (*Takes up telegram, opens and reads it.*) You have now

deceived me in this. You are going to San Francisco? Walter, it says also to Manila, for an absence of a year, at least.

CAMPBELL. I never deceived you in anything. (*Sits himself on steps.*) I am glad that this opportunity has come when I could tell you that, for should we never meet again, I desire to stand, at least, fair in your memory.

MAUD. (*Moving closer.*) You propose to go away and talk coolly of standing fair in my memory. Hearts, you know, have been broken by light words spoken only for something to say. Walter, I could not sleep last night, I was so unhappy.

CAMPBELL. I'm glad, Maud. Not that you could not sleep, but that fate has thrown us together that I can assure you before I go that I am profoundly ignorant of any act of mine that justified you in annulling our engagement as you pre-emptorily did.

MAUD. Tell me true. Didn't you kiss Kitty Brandon in the conservatory last evening?

CAMPBELL. No. I merely spoke to Kitty as I passed her in the crush at Mrs. Meredith's. I was not with her. I was looking for you in the conservatory, and was astounded when you thrust our engagement ring into my hand, and told me all was off between us, and that other gifts that had lost their value would await my messenger on Thursday morning. You repelled me—refused to hear a word in my defense. Until this moment I was wholly ignorant of any cause for your act.

MAUD. Walter, I thought I saw you kiss Kitty Brandon, and I was beside myself with rage. I have looked forward to to-morrow in the hope that this miserable affair could be explained. And now you are going away for a year at least. (*Weeps.*)

CAMPBELL. (*Showing ring.*) No woman but you shall ever wear that ring, I mean as my gift. I don't know what to do with it. Let me leave it with you, in your keeping? You will? Won't you consent to that?

MAUD. I could only wear it on my hand, as I have done for several months.

CAMPBELL. You will let me leave it with you?

MAUD. I don't know. It would not mean now what it once did.

CAMPBELL. (*Petulantly.*) Then give it to your maid. Do what you will with it. (*Puts ring in her hand.*)

MAUD. I won't have it that way.

CAMPBELL. What can I do with it, then?

MAUD. If you loved me as you said you did, you could put it on my engagement finger. I won't take it off.

CAMPBELL. But if I did that, what then?

MAUD. Why, wouldn't it mean that you forgave me my foolish jealousy, and that—

CAMPBELL. You will still be my promised wife? (*Maud slips into his arms.*)

MAUD. When I was a naughty girl and mother had punished me, Walter, she would kiss me to show that she had forgiven me my fault.

CAMPBELL. Am I to kiss you for a like reason? (*Maud nods her head several times. He kisses her.*)

MAUD. I'm so glad you came and compelled me to talk of the weather. I would have died if you had gone away without this reconciliation.

CAMPBELL. Had there been no reconciliation, it would have mattered little to me had I never returned. I shall not go now. I shall wire Charley Woodland, who is all ready, to go instead. This morn-

ing, when I said in his presence "I would as leave be in"—well, a warm place—"as here" he thought I would be much the better for a short stay in our Eastern insular possessions.

MAUD. I'm so glad you are not going. Walter, did you put that ring on my finger? (*He does.*) It is all sunshine now. You have me awfully mixed with our weather talk. Did you ever meet Dolly Decourcy, Walter? I believe I would be more jealous of her than of Kitty Brandon.

CAMPBELL. I do not know that I ever heard of her, much less that I ever met her.

MAUD. Dolly is a charming girl. She and I were chums at the Water Gap last year, but I have lost sight of her recently. If you meet her, I want you to be polite, but you won't be more attentive to her, nor any other woman, except me, than is absolutely demanded from a gentleman in society? You won't, will you?

CAMPBELL. You have heard me whistle—I can't sing—"Just one girl," and that means you, Maud, when I whistle it.

MAUD. Some one is coming. I wonder if anybody saw us, Walter? I forgot that there was another soul on earth but you and me. Come. (*Takes his hand and exit at right.*) Enter Madge, carrying flower in hand, through gate.)

MADGE. I've missed Mr. Eldridge. He must have come through the wayside gate. Everyone is kind to me here, but Mr. Eldridge is kindest of all. I can never repay him for his goodness to me. (*Leans with her hand on trunk of tree.*) It was Mr. Eldridge who found for me a home at the Cedars. But whenever I try to tell him, he laughs and thrusts my thanks aside with a jest. (*Eldridge enters from porch, sees Madge, goes to her, and extends hands which she takes.*)

ELDRIDGE. Why, Madge, it seems to me that each day adds to your stature. You are becoming a well grown girl, rosy and healthful.

MADGE. I gathered these flowers for you. (*Presents them.*) I am strong and well. I am growing so fast that Aunt Sallie Dillard declares she has no time to do anything but lengthen my frocks.

ELDRIDGE. They are kind to you, Madge?

MADGE. Why, it's just heaven here. I owe all my happiness to you. How can I ever repay you?

ELDRIDGE. Never mind that, little one. Grow up to be a true, good woman, and I shall be more than repaid for all I have done.

MADGE. But Aunt Sallie Dillard said the other day that you paid for my board at first, and for my clothing now. She said I had cost you nearly two hundred dollars. I cried all the night long, for while I might, I think, return you kindness with kindness, I can never repay you that money.

ELDRIDGE. Don't think about it, Madge. It has given me pleasure. So it is not as unselfish an act on my part as you imagine.

MADGE. But I was only a waif of the streets. I had no claims on you. I was nothing to you. I was never right bad, Mr. Eldridge. Why, when that policeman arrested me for taking those apples, I hadn't eaten anything for nearly two days. I was starving.

ELDRIDGE. Yes. Famine had put its stamp upon your face that day. I have never asked you, Madge, what you know of your former life. If you prefer, you need not tell me anything, but I think if I knew all that you know, I may aid you, as a friend, more than you imagine.

MADGE. I will tell you all I know. If I cannot trust you, whom can I trust? I am nearly fourteen. I was only twelve when mother died. We were dreadfully poor. Mother, while she sewed, for all the money we had she earned with her needle, taught me, and I learned

from her lips much more than I could have done from books. I made letters on part of a broken slate, and did my sums. Why, when I went to school in the village here last winter, the mistress said I knew many things of which others in my class were ignorant. I tried to learn, for when I did, it seemed to give mother the only pleasure she had.

ELDRIDGE. Your mother was an educated woman?

MADGE. Yes. She was gentle in her manner, and her speech was so different from the other women in the wretched neighborhood where we lived that I often shudder now when I think of her and our poverty. Often we were without fire in winter, and sometimes we were without food for a whole day.

ELDRIDGE. If I can prevent it, the shadow of your past shall never again shadow your future.

MADGE. When mother died, I gave the undertaker her wedding ring and a gold chain and locket she wore about her neck, within her dress. In all our poverty, she clung to those treasures and would not part with them.

ELDRIDGE. A locket? What was in it?

MADGE. Father's picture. They were his last gift to her. The undertaker, for he pitied me, gave me five dollars of the money he received for the sale of the trinkets. When that was gone, I tried hard to get something to do. Occasionally I got work, but I was so young that no one would give me regular employment. I slept in wagons or wherever I could find shelter for the night. I was afraid to die. I was starving when I stole those apples. Had you not pitied me, Mr. Eldridge, I should have been sent to the House of Correction. *(Snatches his hand and kisses it.)*

ELDRIDGE. Don't do that, Madge. Have you nothing that is associated with your mother?

MADGE. Yes. The day before she died she hung a small silk bag about my neck, telling me never to part with it, and not to open it until I was a woman grown.

ELDRIDGE. Have you it still?

MADGE. Yes. There are only papers in it, I am sure. I will show you the bag. *(Takes it from her breast. Eldridge looks at it attentively.)*

ELDRIDGE. These initials L. D. are not yours? What was your mother's maiden name?

MADGE. She never told me. Her Christian name was Lillian.

ELDRIDGE. Do not mention this bag to anyone.

MADGE. You are the only person to whom I have ever shown it, and you are the only person to whom I shall ever show it. *(Calls for "Madge! Madge!" from house.)*

ELDRIDGE. Keep my secret and I shall keep yours.

MADGE. Your secret? I know no secret of yours, Mr. Eldridge.

ELDRIDGE. My secret is how you and I first met.

MADGE. I couldn't tell that. Shame would keep my lips closed. *(Cries for "Madge")* I must go now or Aunt Sallie will be cross. *(Exit by porch door.)*

ELDRIDGE. Poor little girl. She does not know that I have learned much of her past of which she is ignorant. She has concealed nothing from me. Back of it all there is a cruel wrong of which she and her mother were the victims. *(Amos Dean enters through gate.)*

DEAN. I am glad you are here, Frank. There is no man on whose judgment I so rely as yours. I am in sore trouble and I seek your advice.

ELDRIDGE. I will gladly aid you, if in my power.

DEAN. Be seated. (*Sits on bench at base of tree.*) Frank, I had a daughter who grew to womanhood. You did not know that, for neither my wife nor I have mentioned Lillian's name for nearly fifteen years. She became enamored of a young surveyor, who was then constructing the railroad through this section. He was a bright young fellow, and I understood was well connected. I discouraged his attention to my child, believing his love ephemeral—a thing merely of the moment, and that he would never wed the daughter of a farmer.

ELDRIDGE. What was the young man's name?

DEAN. Philip Spencer. (*Eldridge starts.*) Finally I forbade his visits. Lillian and he continued to meet unknown to me. Several weeks after he left this neighborhood, Lillian went ostensibly on a visit to her Aunt, a well-to-do childless widow, living in New York. Subsequently I learned that her Aunt was in California, and her house closed at that time.

ELDRIDGE. I am more interested in your narrative than you imagine, Mr. Dean.

DEAN. Lillian was absent three weeks. When she returned, she was despondent. She spoke of many things she had seen, but avoided mentioning her Aunt, who at times was peculiarly reserved. We ascribed Lillian's silence to that cause.

ELDRIDGE. You are disclosing this family skeleton at your own suggestion, Mr. Dean?

DEAN. Intentionally on my part. Several months after Lillian's return, my wife made a disclosure to me that crushed me with the shame impending over this household. Lillian declared she was the legal wife of Philip Spencer, and in substantiation exhibited a wedding ring, which she had not worn until I demanded from her the truth. I spurned that as a thing proving nothing—something that could be had in the open market. Her marriage certificate, she declared, had been mislaid, but she gave the name of the clergyman who had performed the ceremony. I learned that he had died suddenly the day following the purported marriage. The church records were silent, no entry of the ceremony appearing therein. In my indignation, I turned my daughter from the home of her childhood.

ELDRIDGE. She may have told the simple truth, Mr. Dean.

DEAN. Yes. When Lillian stood for the last time on that porch, she said—I remember every word—"Father, may you live to know that you have driven me, a pure but wretched woman, from your doors. I am as free from shame as my own mother." I never saw her again, nor did I hear anything appertaining to her since then, until this hour.

ELDRIDGE. She passed wholly out of your life?

DEAN. Yes. My wife and I never mentioned her. After my wife's death, I found that she had still treasured Lillian's first dress her first socks, her first shoes, and on the covering of the package she had written "Merciful God! can we have wronged our only child?"

ELDRIDGE. Why do you tell me this now?

DEAN. Because to-day, from the dead past, comes to me an accusing voice. Lillian was Philip Spencer's wife. Soon after the marriage he was assigned to survey a road in the Rockies. He and Lillian decided not to announce their relationship until he returned, in a few months. Nothing was heard from the surveying party. Lillian had no proof of her marriage.

ELDRIDGE. The little she had you branded as false.

DEAN. The facts are that the party had been snowbound in the mountains, and when found by Indians, all were dead but Spencer, and he was insane, the result of exposure and privation. Because of his

infirmity the Indians accepted him as a sacred charge from Heaven. About a year ago some of our army officers learned that a white man was with one of the Snake tribes. Spencer was then placed in an asylum, where in time he recovered his reason, but he was so broken in health that he died three weeks ago. Before his death, his statement was secured. His papers, which the Indians had preserved because of their association with the man whom they held as near to God, disclosed my address. The documents were forwarded, and I received them not an hour ago. (*Takes out paper.*) Here is the certificate of Lillians marriage.

ELDRIDGE. Listen, Mr. Dean, to the sequel of your story. Philip, Spencer, was my mother's half brother—the only child of grandmother's second marriage. In the disposition of grandmother's estate, nearly thirty thousand dollars were allotted to him. He never received the fund, which still remains in the control of our firm. I was reluctant to claim it, and Aunt Eleanor would not. The income yearly, after the legal charges were deducted, was invested, and this estate has almost doubled in value. Will you ask Madge to come here?

DEAN. (*Walks to porch and calls Madge.*) What has she to do with this matter? (*Madge enters from porch.*)

ELDRIDGE. Come to me, Madge. Will you let me examine the contents of your mother's bag?

MADGE. (*Hesitating.*) Can I consent without breaking my promise to mother? (*Takes bag from neck and hands to Eldridge.*) I will do it. I trust you. You would not ask me to do a wrong.

ELDRIDGE. I shall not abuse your faith. I believe in this I am only carrying out your mother's purpose. (*Opens bag and takes out papers.*) As I thought. Mr. Dean, your daughter Lillian is beyond human consideration, but the child of Philip and Lillian Spencer is already an inmate of your household. Madge Crawford, as you know her, is actually Madge Spencer, your granddaughter. Yes, Madge, that is true. Your mother was Lillian Dean, Amos Dean's only child.

DEAN. Those papers! What are they?

ELDRIDGE. Letters from Philip to Lillian. Save one, all are prior to the marriage. The last was written from Chicago, and is addressed to his wife. There is no missing link in the chain of evidence.

DEAN. Madge, I was unkind to your mother. I doubted her truthfulness—I— (*Eldridge walks back of Dean.*)

ELDRIDGE. (*Aside to Dean.*) Do not tell her of that misunderstanding or your cruelty to your daughter. (*Aloud.*) Madge, your grandfather is overwhelmed with the suddenness of his great happiness. Comfort him as your mother would have comforted him, were she here now. (*Madge goes to Dean and pets him. He seems much affected. Enter Campbell and Maud from right.*)

CAMPBELL. Are we intruding?

ELDRIDGE. No. You have come to witness a happy scene. We have just learned beyond all doubt, Miss Forrester, that our little friend Madge is the granddaughter of Mr. Dean, the only child of his daughter Lillian Spencer. Madge has been restored to her grandfather to comfort and cheer him in his declining years.

MAUD. (*Kissing Madge.*) I'm so glad. Why, it is perfectly lovely. You dear little woman, we all rejoice with you.

MADGE. But I do not comprehend it all. (*Goes to Eldridge.*) In finding my grandfather, must I lose you? Will you not be to me the same you have always been?

ELDRIDGE. It will not make any change in our relationship, Madge, you and I are kin.

MADGE. Then, I am content. Won't you leave me here for a few minutes—I want to think it all over. (*All retire through porch door.*) Yes, but it will make a difference between Mr. Eldridge and me. Grandfather must be consulted now about me instead of him. I can't help it, but I don't care for grandfather as I care for Mr. Eldridge. I wish it had never happened so. (*Weeps. Dan Dunn enters, and touches Madge on shoulder.*)

MADGE. What do you want?

DAN. Send that city chap away. Send him away.

MADGE. Go home, Dan. Go home, please— (*coaxing*). Won't you, Dan?

DAN. Send that city chap away, I tell you.

MADGE. There is no one here but me, Dan. You will go home to please me, Dan?

DAN. Yes. (*Walks through gate and turns.*) Send that city chap away. Send him away. (*Exit.*)

MADGE. He will go now without my telling him. (*Drops on seat by the tree.*) I feel as I did when mother died—all alone—all alone. (*Weeps, as curtain descends.*)

ACT II.

[SCENE—*Woods of the Cedar farm. Autumn afternoon; large tree near centre of stage, with protruding roots; fence in rear, showing stile; log on right near front. Dolly DeCourcy and Madge Spencer are seated on roots when curtain rises.*]

MADGE. Are you very tired, Miss Dolly?

DOLLY. I am slightly weary, but not particularly tired. Don't worry, Madge, a few minutes rest here and all will be right.

MADGE. I had forgotten that you are an invalid.

DOLLY. Not an invalid. I am gaining strength rapidly each day. Probably I have overtaxed myself a trifle this afternoon. But everything was so lovely. The autumn foliage, so beautiful in its colorings; the air warm and balmy; while a charming peacefulness pervaded the landscape. It all had an influence that has soothed me as though it was nature's benediction.

MADGE. You have been quite ill?

DOLLY. With typhoid fever, Madge, most people are quite ill. Dr. Fullerton, I am told, at one time entertained but slight hopes of my recovery.

MADGE. I'm glad he was mistaken. Why, I feel as if I had always known and loved you, and yet you have been here only two weeks.

DOLLY. And I in turn am glad that you love me, Madge. We shall be the best of friends—I have so few friends. My whole life, that I can recall—has been passed in the companionship of a sweet old lady, who is now dead.

MADGE. And she loved you?

DOLLY. Better than I merited. She was ill several months before she died. I nursed her until the last.

MADGE. That was too great a task for you.

DOLLY. It was my desire. No one ever had a more considerate or more generous, loving friend than she was to me.

MADGE. I am sure that nursing was the cause of your illness.

DOLLY. No, it was not. After her death, I was depressed, Dr.

Fullerton, only a few days ago, said my illness was due to mental worry rather than physical exhaustion. Why, she was dead six months before my health began to break.

MADGE. And you came here to get strong and well?

DOLLY. Yes. Madge, dear, I am without any near relatives on either side.

MADGE. Mr. Lex, when he was here to arrange for your coming to the Cedars, said you were a wealthy young lady.

DOLLY. Don't talk of that, Madge. That is one of the things that worried me sorely before my illness. It is true that a large fortune has been left to me, but—well, we will not speak of that now.

MADGE. Why, I thought rich people were always happy. (*Looking a round.*) I must have mislaid those beautiful autumn leaves I gathered for you. Did you notice where I put them?

DOLLY. No, I last saw them in your hand.

MADGE. I know every foot of the ground where we have been. If you don't mind, Miss Dolly, you can sit here and rest while I look for those leaves. It won't take me more than ten minutes—not more than fifteen at the utmost.

DOLLY. I can spread this shawl on the ground. This root will do for a pillow. I may possibly fall asleep while you are gone, for I am drowsy.

MADGE. (*Spreading shawl, helps Dolly to arrange herself, then taps her approvingly.*) There! Now you are comfortable. (*Kisses her.*) Be a good girl and go to sleep. I shall not be long absent. (*Exit.*)

DOLLY. I wish Madge had not recalled those bitter memories. I must be more tired than I thought. Forty winks will refresh me. (*Falls asleep. Eldridge enters, crossing stile.*)

ELDRIDGE. Just the day of days for a stroll. I should enjoy this outing could I rid myself of that horrid incubus. That infernal bequest will mentally use me up, if I do not speedily reach a final decision. (*Lights a cigar.*) Smoke, it is said, allays irritation and is an aid to cogitation. It may help me to the right conclusion. (*About to seat himself on root, when he notices Dolly.*) A woman asleep! Dolly opens her eyes.) I beg your pardon. (*Throws cigar away.*) I did not know you were here. I regret that I have disturbed your slumbers.

DOLLY. (*Aside.*) Frank Eldridge. I know him from the photograph he sent Aunt Eleanor, at her request, a short time before her death. (*Aloud.*) Really, I have no better title here than you. I was resting a moment. I must have fallen asleep. (*Attempts to rise.*)

ELDRIDGE. Do not disturb yourself.

DOLLY. (*Rising to sitting posture.*) You are considerate. I am still claiming an invalid's indulgences. Have I met you before. Your face is not unfamiliar to me?

ELDRIDGE. Let me introduce myself. I am Frank Lloyd Eldridge.

DOLLY. Oh! I'm Dolly DeCourcy. (*Frank starts.*)

FRANK. Dolly DeCourcy?

DOLLY. (*Laughing.*) I know one Eleanor DeCourcy, and I have heard of Mr. Frank Eldridge. My information relates to a gentleman who bears the same name as you, precisely.

ELDRIDGE. I am that Frank. May I ask you to tell me something of Miss Eleanor DeCourcy? I have never seen her. Probably you know that her path in life and mine have been strangely crossed recently. Tell me of her?

DOLLY. Eleanor, I think, is quite nice. That is a woman's word,

and is exceedingly elastic in its meaning. But I am prejudiced in her favor.

ELDRIDGE. You know then of my Aunt Eleanor's peculiar will?

DOLLY. What, the extraordinary condition upon which depends a fortune? I know that annoys Eleanor. Believe me, she was absolutely ignorant, until recently, of the harsh term imposed upon you. She often wonders if there is no legal way to set aside that part of the will affecting your inheritance.

ELDRIDGE. But one. That is to establish the mental incapacity of Aunt to execute any will whatever.

DOLLY. (*Startled.*) That Miss Eleanor Lloyd was insane? No! never! never that! That must never be suggested.

ELDRIDGE. You have heard Miss DeCourcy speak of the odd bequest?

DOLLY. Yes. I know Eleanor's views and desires. As a matter of law, Mr. Eldridge, suppose Eleanor should refuse to accept the portion given absolutely to her by the will, would the effect not be to make Miss Lloyd die intestate as to that, and would it not go to you as the heir at law?

ELDRIDGE. Miss DeCourcy must never do that. I should despise myself if I received any part of Aunt Eleanor's estate by depriving that girl of that which Aunt desired she should have absolutely.

DOLLY. Cannot you credit Eleanor with a like reluctance to deprive you of your birthright?

ELDRIDGE. But my claims are based upon consanguinity, whereas the girl's is founded upon an unselfish love for the dead woman. She gave to Aunt that affection which I withheld. I have given this matter much thought, Miss DeCourcy, for I cannot claim that wealth has no charms for me, but I am honest enough, I trust, to recognize that this girl's rights are superior to mine. She was a toddling child when she entered into the lonely woman's life, and that she loved Aunt Eleanor without a thought of the money will not admit of question. Children not only tell the truth, but they act the truth. I never saw Aunt Eleanor but twice in my life.

DOLLY. Eleanor did love Miss Lloyd.

ELDRIDGE. I may never meet Miss DeCourcy. You will. Pardon me, but will you tell her what I have said? Particularly as to her suggested renunciation of the estate left to her without condition.

DOLLY. She will know. Why do you not meet her, Mr. Eldridge? Mr. Lex could arrange such an interview.

ELDRIDGE. Suppose, Miss DeCourcy, a doting old lady had provided by her will a husband for you, a man you did not know, should you be pleased were that man to call upon you, view you as a possible wife, and then at his pleasure refuse to accept the conditions governing his inheritance?

DOLLY. But I am not—

ELDRIDGE. Pardon me. I merely made it personal that you might better appreciate the exceedingly embarrassing position in which it places Miss DeCourcy, leaving the man wholly out of consideration.

DOLLY. I know it is a source of much unhappiness to Eleanor.

ELDRIDGE. I would relieve her of that did I know how it could be done without suggesting an insult to her. I cannot forget she was the only sunshine that ever entered into Aunt Eleanor's life. My conscience chides me that I was not more attentive.

DOLLY. But you are not a—

ELDRIDGE. No, I am not a wealthy man. I trust I am a gentleman. Besides, I have never known anyone profit by a mean act. The

loss in self-respect in such cases always exceeds the worth of the things acquired by those means.

DOLLY. But it is you who must act.

ELDRIDGE. Mr. Lex, lawyer-like, advises that nothing should be done to-day that can be put off until the morrow. Hence, I am drifting. If at any time before the expiration of the period named in Aunt's will, I could meet Miss DeCourcy, without offensively intruding upon her, I should be pleased to do so. From what you have told me, I fear she may act unwisely. I shall strive to prevent her taking that step.

DOLLY. I reckon she is drifting also. You know ample provision was made for her support during the interval between Miss Lloyd's death and Eleanor's coming of age.

ELDRIDGE. The income from half a million well invested is a helpful anchor in the hour of trouble.

DOLLY. If it were not for that condition in the will, you would be enjoying a like income.

ELDRIDGE. Yes. Do not regard me as a mere interrogation point, but may I ask you if Miss DeCourcy ever mentioned why it was Aunt Eleanor desired this marriage? She knew so little of me. Then why should she fetter that girl, who was everything to her, with this absurd condition?

DOLLY. It is to you that it applies, not to Eleanor.

ELDRIDGE. It is not all one-sided? I could not marry Miss DeCourcy unless she consents to be my wife.

DOLLY. (*With haughty manner.*) You have, then, no doubt as to her consenting?

ELDRIDGE. She is likely to resent this disposition by will. Yet she might, inasmuch that her refusal carries a penalty for me, deem Aunt's request a duty, and for that reason yield, prompted thereto wholly by her womanly sympathies, irrespective of any love for me.

DOLLY. Eleanor is not so weak a woman that she would barter her future for a shadow.

ELDRIDGE. I have bungled in presenting my meaning.

DOLLY. Were she to regard your attentions as addressed solely to the estate; that she was an encumbrance to be accepted with the fortune, might not that cause her to reject your suit?

ELDRIDGE. I never thought of that. By George! that assuredly multiplies the objectional features of Aunt's bequest to me. Pardon me for intruding my personal affairs upon you as I have done. Are you staying in this neighborhood?

DOLLY. At the Cedars for a brief season.

ELDRIDGE. Why, I am on my way there. I am almost one of the family. You have been ill. Let me assist you to the house.

DOLLY. I prefer to go alone, Mr. Eldridge.

ELDRIDGE. Why? Have I been presumptuous?

DOLLY. You have been considerate, but your introduction was too informal. This chance interview, like Van Winkle's occasional tippie, don't count.

MADGE. (*Without.*) I found them, Miss Dolly. (*Enters, secs Eldridge, and goes to him, holding out both hands.*) Mr. Eldridge! I'm so glad you came. You are always welcome. Oh, Miss Dolly, you don't know Mr. Eldridge? (*Dolly shakes her head.*) Miss DeCourcy, permit me to present Mr. Eldridge. (*They bow.*) That is the first time I ever introduced anybody. How did I do it?

ELDRIDGE. Well. You do everything well, Madge.

MADGE. Mr. Eldridge is the best friend I have on earth. (*Aside*

to Dolly.) Now you have seen my paragon. That's the word you used, wasn't it?

DOLLY. (*Aside to Madge.*) Yes. (*Aloud to Frank.*) You have a staunch champion in Madge.

ELDRIDGE. She accords me credit far beyond my merits.

DOLLY. Madge, lend me a helping hand. I fancy when I slipped a while ago I sprained my ankle slightly.

ELDRIDGE. May I offer my aid also, Miss DeCourcy?

DOLLY. (*Extending hand to both, rises.*) I have rarely been so highly favored. (*Limps.*) Really, I must rest a moment. (*Sits on log.*) Don't let me delay you, Mr. Eldridge.

ELDRIDGE. Several years ago, while at the Cedars, I was hurt and compelled to use a crutch. I will get it and return presently. (*Dolly raises hand in dissent.*) We will discuss that later on. (*Exit.*)

MADGE. Mr. Eldridge! Mr. Eldridge! He only shakes his head, laughs but will not halt. I should have gone in place of him. It is not safe for him.

DOLLY. What danger can threaten him?

MADGE. I don't know, but I fear for his safety.

DOLLY. Madge, you have a reason for your fears?

MADGE. Well, then, Dan, Mr. Dunn's eldest son, is an imbecile. He follows me about like a big dog, and will obey my orders generally like a dog. But for some cause, he hates Mr. Eldridge, and Dan may do him serious injury.

DOLLY. Then Dan loves you and is jealous of any attention to you by Mr. Eldridge.

MADGE. I'm only kind to Dan. I pity him. But recently when Mr. Eldridge is at the Cedars, I cannot control Dan. He was in the lane only a few minutes ago. I did not know then that Mr. Eldridge was here.

DOLLY. Don't be frightened. Do you know, Madge, I recognized Mr. Eldridge from your description, (*aside*) and Aunt Eleanor's photograph of him.

MADGE. I would rather die than that any harm should come to him. Should I not go? I can restrain Dan, if anyone can.

DOLLY. If you think it is best. (*Exit Madge.*) So Frank Eldridge, Eleanor DeCourcy and you have met. It was all his mistake. He cannot have known that Dolly was his Aunt's net name for me, and that others have adopted it, until generally I am known by that name. Why should I explain his blunder? I should have made it clear to him at first: now I would be ashamed to set him right, after our conversation. I cannot tell him the exact truth. Chance alone must correct the error. He is certainly attractive, pleasant in address, more outspoken and honest than I. I regret that I did not undeceive him. I want to command at least his respect. (*Enter Campbell and Maud by way of stile.*)

CAMPBELL. I thought certainly that Frank would come.

MAUD. The family will be disappointed if he does not.

CAMPBELL. I am not positive that he has any knowledge of this quilting bee next week. I returned from Washington this morning and found your note. At his office, I learned that Frank had gone into the country for a fortnight, but had neglected to leave his address.

MAUD. Do you notice any change in him recently? That vivacity, which was so attractive in him, is gone. At times he is even morose.

CAMPBELL. I have noticed that he is preoccupied, but Frank can never be morose.

MAUD. What is the matter with him?

CAMPBELL. I fancy it is that clause in his Aunt's will.

MAUD. That was a foolish thing to do. Imagine a girl the subject of a legacy.

CAMPBELL. No wife, no legacy. The poor fellow is denied all opportunity to exercise the right of choice.

MAUD. He craves the money, but not the girl. Is that it?

CAMPBELL. I presume he would be glad of the money.

MAUD. He is a good soul. I honor him for his kindness to Madge. It was beautiful.

CAMPBELL. The sequel was not less so. Maud, Frank would renounce that bequest to-morrow if he did not think that would carry an implied insult to the girl.

MAUD. Now, if he'd only fall in love and become engaged to another woman. Men can get engaged so easily. That would solve the puzzle.

CAMPBELL. If Frank should fall in love, trust us to put up a job that would end in an engagement all right. That would let him out of the difficulty, but it would forfeit the money.

DOLLY. I wish I could steal away without their knowing that I had been here.

MAUD. Two weeks ago, I met Dolly DeCourcy. She was coming to the Cedars. She is here now. I thought that if Frank's Eleanor DeCourcy were only Dolly DeCourcy, he could bless his lucky stars. She is charming. (*Turns, sees Dolly, and goes to her.*) The old adage holds good. Talk of the angels and you hear the rustling of their wings. (*Kisses her.*)

DOLLY. A limping angel—I sprained my ankle slightly. I am waiting for a crutch.

MAUD. Miss DeCourcy, permit me to present Mr. Campbell. (*They bow.*) Why not make a crutch of us?

DOLLY. Mr. Eldridge has gone to the house for one.

MAUD. (*Laughing.*) Isn't that funny? Frank waiting upon a Miss DeCourcy. Probably you don't know, but an old Aunt left Frank a fortune provided he married Miss Eleanor DeCourcy.

DOLLY. I have heard of that.

MAUD. Is she related to you?

DOLLY. She is exceedingly close to me.

MAUD. Not your sister?

DOLLY. I have no sister. I must tell you that I heard what you and Mr. Campbell said, but I did not designedly play the evesdropper. I simply could not get away.

CAMPBELL. The old adage failed there. The listener does occasionally hear something good said of her.

DOLLY. Don't let me detain you. I'll come hobbling along presently.

MAUD. Isn't that tantamount to a dismissal? Well, day-day. (*Dolly shakes her hands to them as they exit.*)

DOLLY. Fortunately, Maud knows me only as Dolly DeCourcy. How selfish I am. I'm not to be compared with Frank. He thinks only of shielding me, whom he believes he never met. Can it be possible that there is any danger to Frank from Madge's imbecile lover? I recall reading that the jealousy of the insane or feeble minded generally, manifests itself in homicidal impulses, in the desire to slay the person of whom they are jealous. Frank must be warned. He'd only laugh at our womanly fears. Yet there is danger. (*Enter Dan, carrying a heavy stick.*) That is Dan now. I'm sure of it. He will not harm me. (*Aloud.*) Are you looking for anyone?

DAN. Madge! Madge! Send that city chap away. Send him away.

DOLLY. Did Madge go that way? (*Points to left stage.*)

DAN. (*Acting as if uncertain, then going in direction Dolly has pointed out.*) Madge! Madge! Send that city chap away. (*Exit.*)

DOLLY. He is dangerous. Here comes Frank and Madge. If we hasten we could reach the house before Dan will return, for he will return. (*Enter Madge and Frank, the latter carrying a crutch, which he drops on stage.*)

MADGE. (*Speaking as if short of breath.*) I met Mr. Eldridge returning. I took a short cut, got caught in a thicket of prickly vines, and it was so difficult to get my dress loosened that I almost missed him.

ELDRIDGE. Madge, I think, was trying to tell me of some threatening danger from Mr. Dunn's imbecile son.

DOLLY. There is great danger to you.

ELDRIDGE. But the old saying tells us that threatened men live long.

DOLLY. (*Rising.*) Dan does not threaten. Hence the adage does not hold good. Let us go at once. I am ready. (*Dan enters. Eldridge stoops to pick up crutch, and Madge to gather the bunch of leaves. Dan runs forward and raises his club to strike Eldridge, when Dolly throws her shawl over his head.*) Quick! Help! He will break from me!

ELDRIDGE. I can manage him. Madge and you, Miss DeCourcy, hasten to the house.

MADGE. No, he would tire you out. His strength is enormous. You and Miss Dolly must go. I can quiet him, if you two will only go away.

ELDRIDGE. I will not leave you, child, to the mercy of that man. (*Dan is struggling all the time.*)

DOLLY. Madge is right. He will obey her and will do her no harm.

MADGE. (*Taking hold of ends of shawl.*) Go if you would not have him murder us all. The sight of you, Mr. Eldridge, infuriates him. I never told you a lie—I am not telling you one now. I can control him if you leave him wholly to me. Now, go! For God's sake, go!

ELDRIDGE. That would be cowardly in me.

DOLLY. She is right. She will be in no danger. It is your presence alone that causes the danger. Come. I can get along without the crutch. (*She takes Eldridge's hands and leads him reluctantly off the stage.*)

MADGE. (*Drawing Dan to the log, and removing the shawl.*) Now, (*patting his shoulder*) won't you sit here quietly with me, Dan? There is no one here but you and me, Dan.

DAN. Madge, send that city chap away.

MADGE. He has gone. You wouldn't hurt me, Dan. You wouldn't hurt Madge. You are so good to me, aren't you, Dan? You gather leaves for me that are beyond my reach. Don't you remember yesterday (*taking his hand and patting it*) how you climbed the chestnut in the corn stubble and shook the limbs until I had filled my basket with nuts? That was so good in you, Dan. (*He nods his head, and laughs as if pleased.*)

DAN. Madge, send that city chap away.

MADGE. Dan, lie here by this log and Madge will smooth your hair. You'd like that, Dan, wouldn't you?

DAN. Yes. (*Rests against log while Madge sitting smooths his hair with her hands.*)

MADGE. (*Looking in direction Eldridge and Dolly went.*) They have reached the gate. He will be safe there from Dan. They are on the porch. They have entered the house. Safe, thank God, he is safe! (*Curtain falls.*)

ACT III.

[SCENE—*Sitting room at the Cedars. Door in rear left.—Interval of a week. Mantle with large open fireplace. Musket hung on chimney breast. Small window in rear right, and large window on right side. Open door with staircase showing on left side. When curtain rises, the women are seated around a quilting frame, working. Lightning flashes and distant thunder heard occasionally, which continues through act.*]

SALLIE DILLARD. Oh, this is a memorial quilt.

MAUD. What is that?

DOLLY. Years and years ago, I believe they were quite fashionable. At all events, in the country.

MAUD. But that statement doesn't make me any the wiser.

DOLLY. A memorial quilt is made from articles of clothing contributed by various persons, each patch having some personal history of the donor associated with it.

MAUD. Oh, I understand. Why, Aunt Sallie, (*points*) that is a part of the dress I wore when I first was sent away to boarding school. I mailed it to you at your request. I remember if there was ever a heart-broken miss in short skirts, I was that girl. (*Dolly rises and puts both hands to her back.*)

RACHEL MEADOWS. Miss Dolly, if your back is troubling you, why don't you try a porous plaster? I have heard it said that Mariah Thompson, before she was married, was a weakly sort, and she put them plasters all around her waist instead of corsets. It done her a heap of good. She's been the mother of fourteen. Had twins twice.

MAUD. (*Aside to Dolly.*) Don't mind her. She is only reminiscent. She is full of such stories. But she's a good old soul. (*Dolly laughs and scats herself.*)

RACHEL MEADOWS. Law bless us! That's a piece of your grandmother's frock, Sallie Dillard. How people do keep such things. Why, I was talking to old Mrs. Nash 'tother day—she was eighty-six last spring—when she showed me the socks she knit for her first child. It didn't live more'n three months, but as she smoothed 'em out her eyes filled with tears, thinkin' of that babe that had died more'n sixty year ago.

SALLIE. Talking about Mariah Thompson, when I was a young girl, Mrs. Thompson, that's Mariah's mother-in-law, was just dragging around the house, feeling miserable. I dropped in to see her. Old Dr. Jones was attending her. He was doing his best, but he never did know much. I persuaded her to take some home-made medicine that my great-grandmother gave to Uncle Tom—that's his gun—(*Points to chimney.*)—when he came back from the war of '12, almost dead with janders. We always keep some of that medicine on hand.

MAUD. And it cured her?

SALLIE. I sent her a quart bottle of the mixture and told her to

take a table-spoonfull every two hours. - The next day Mrs. Thompson died. Don't you think, old Dr. Jones spitefully told some of the neighbors that it was my medicine killed her and not his doctoring. I haven't spoke to any of the Jones since, and that's nearly forty-two years ago.

RACHEL. Why, Sallie, I disremember seeing you at Nancy Steel's funeral. It was just lovely. She was dressed in white, but she kind appeared to fall in about the jaws. I'm pretty certain that undertaker Brown forgot to put her false teeth in when he laid out the corpse. He's the most forgetfullest man I ever knowed.

DOLLY. (*Pointing.*) Aunt Sallie, isn't that a piece of the dress Mrs. Dean wore to the husking bee in returning from which Mr. Dean proposed to her? You showed part of it to me the other day and told me the story of that proposal.

SALLIE. Yes, and she was very happy in her wedded life. The only shadow that came into it was Lillian's secret marriage. If Margaret could have lived to know that her daughter had not disgraced her family, she would have died without a regret for anything that happened during the time she was mistress of the Cedars.

RACHEL. Amos Dean never had pity on those who strayed. But he is a just man.

DOLLY. Madge is now the very apple of his eye. He could see no fault in her. I am not sure that I could see a fault in her either.

MAUD. May he not be trying to make atonement in his devotion to her for his harshness to her mother?

DOLLY. Mr. Dean is an exponent of the austerity characterizing the training in Christian households in his youth. Beneath that, I think, I have caught glimpses of his inner self, and I am sure that he has a kindly and sympathetic heart.

SALLIE. Why, where is Madge. She hasn't taken part in the quilting, and she was so active in arranging for it. (*Vivid flash of lightning.*) Girls, put your needles and scissors away. They will attract the lightning. Some of you help me carry this frame into the kitchen. The gentlemen will soon be here. Mr. Eldridge's room will be so full of smoke to-morrow that it will strangle me when I enter it. (*Women help Sallie and Rachel carry off frame through hall. A knock at door.*)

MAUD. I'm afraid to go.

DOLLY. I'm not. (*Opens door, messenger delivers letter, Dolly signs book, and seems to speak to man who shakes his head; then closes door.*) A special delivery letter for Mr. Eldridge. The man refused to come in for shelter. What am I to do with it?

MAUD. Why, give it to Frank. We have stopped work, and it is time the men ceased smoking. Tell them so, Dolly. (*Dolly ascends stair, meets Campbell, seems to speak to him. He shakes head. She continues to ascend while Campbell descends.*). So you made her take the letter?

CAMPBELL. Yes. I was thinking—that—(*hesitates.*)

MAUD. I will owe you a penny. You were thinking?

CAMPBELL. About Dolly and Frank. They are becoming the best of friends.

MAUD. An unconscious attraction. Wouldn't it be jolly to marry those two?

CAMPBELL. You suggested that a week ago.

MAUD. I still think it would be ever so funny if Frank should marry a DeCourcy, but not Eleanor DeCourcy; and Dolly's wealthy,

I'm told. (*Dolly and Frank descend stair.*) Let us leave them. That will be a point made in the game. (*Walk to door of hall.*)

DOLLY. Don't let us drive you away.

MAUD. I've impressed Mr. Campbell for dining room service. (*Exit Maud and Campbell.*)

FRANK. I must hasten to the village and answer this letter by wire.

DOLLY. The office will be closed. Besides, the storm will break before you can return. (*Flash of lightning discloses to Dolly Dan Dunn peering in at the window in rear of right. She turns to Eldridge in alarm.*) You must not go—there is danger to you apart from the storm!

FRANK. You are needlessly apprehensive.

DOLLY. No. You are ignorant of much I know that makes me fearful for you.

FRANK. I thank you for that.

DOLLY. There is danger menacing you. Promise me you will not go?

FRANK. It cannot be from that imbecile Dan? Why, his assault was only a temporary outburst of causeless frenzy.

DOLLY. It was not. He is jealous of you.

FRANK. Jealous of me?

DOLLY. Yes. He loves Madge. Your attention to her has aroused in him murderous impulses.

FRANK. Surely you are mistaken.

DOLLY. I am not mistaken. Madge loves you, and this witless man has fathomed that girl's feeling for you. His one idea looks to your removal. Little more than an animal, he knows only force to accomplish his ends.

FRANK. Miss Dolly, I know that Madge loves me, but her affection approaches that only which a daughter holds for a parent, nothing more.

DOLLY. She loves you with a woman's love, which takes no heed of years nor circumstances.

FRANK. Not that! No! no! you must not say that!

DOLLY. You will not go to the village to-night? Put it off until the morning. Won't you believe me? The danger is nearer than you think. By the lightning flash I saw the face of Dan Dunn at that window. It was no longer a human face, but that of a ravenous beast in search of its prey. For my sake, you will not go?

FRANK. (*Aside, walking forward.*) For your sake! If I dared to tell you what you are to me. You would not credit that I could love you as passionately as I do on so brief an acquaintance. You would resent my proposal as the folly of a weak man. (*Aloud, returning to Dolly.*) Is it not Madge who should be warned and means taken to protect her from this man?

DOLLY. Dan loves her and will not harm her. But you have not answered my request.

FRANK. I will not go, Miss Dolly, if I can put off my answer until the morning. May I glance at this letter. (*She nods.*) Were it merely an affair personal to myself, I would not go. But this involves a possible loss to another, and whatever is done must be done early on the morrow. I regret, but I have no choice. It is imperative that I should answer this to-night. (*Exit by hall.*)

DOLLY. Why could I not go with him? He will not propose it, and I dare not make the offer. The next half-hour will bring to me the

agony of suspense. (*Enter Eldridge, wearing a light overcoat.*) You are armed? You will heed my warning to that extent, at least?

ELDRIDGE. In deference to your warning, I have taken that precaution. Yet I believe that in half an hour you will be amused at your fears for my safety. I thank you for your consideration. (*Takes her hand.*) I will return speedily. (*Exit.*)

DOLLY. May Heaven prove my fears are groundless. (*Dean, Campbell and the women enter from hall.*)

MAUD. Why, Dolly, where is Frank?

DOLLY. He has gone to the village to wire an answer to that letter.

CAMPBELL. The storm will be upon us by that time. Ladies, while we were smoking, Mr. Dean entertained us with recitals of some of the traditions of this neighborhood.

MAUD. That was unkind, Mr. Dean. We women would have enjoyed your stories as well as the gentlemen did.

CAMPBELL. They were interesting. More so since we were familiar with the locations where they were laid.

RACHEL. Did he tell of Dick Scattergood's ride?

SALLIE. Because it has associations with a storm, you think of that now, Rachel?

MAUD. Tell it, Mr. Dean. Dolly and I have never heard it.

DEAN. I will, to please you. Be seated. Dick Scattergood was a wealthy, young fellow, who came of age the year George III was crowned. There were merry makings that day in the old stone house near the bend of the road yonder, where Stony Brook crosses the highway. Well, Dick was in love with a pretty girl in the village, and one night they had a tiff. A heavy storm was coming up as he mounted his horse to return. The girl sought to prevail upon him to remain until the storm passed, insisting that it would break violently before he could reach his home.

MAUD. Just like a man. He sulked, didn't he?

DEAN. Have it that way if you wish, Miss Maud. But at all events he started. The storm was the most destructive in many years. Trees were uprooted by the score. Just beyond this house, Dick, who had urged his horse to a wild gallop, rushed into a fallen tree and was thrown over the animal's head. He was found next morning, his neck broken, and the horse dead, impaled on a limb, which, broken in the crash, protruded several feet from the trunk.

DOLLY. That was horrible.

RACHEL. But you have not finished the story, Mr. Dean.

DEAN. The rest is merely superstition. The negroes—we had slaves in New York Colony at that time—and many of the whites declared that the ghost of Dick Scattergood and his horse were often seen coursing along this road in the night time, particularly during unusually heavy storms. (*Noise of horses feet moving rapidly are heard.*)

MAUD. I am frightened. What did the appearance portend? You must tell us, Mr. Dean.

DEAN. Superstitious people asserted that it foretold the violent death of someone before daybreak.

DOLLY. I do not, I cannot, believe such omens. That which we heard was only a belated rider hastening home. (*Walks to front. Aside.*) Should anything happen to Frank, I should go mad. (*Madge enters hastily.*)

MADGE. (*Looking about the room.*) Where is Mr. Eldridge? Don't sit as if you were stone images. Answer me. Where is he?

DOLLY. What do you fear for him? What have you heard or

seen, girl? He has only gone to the village to send a telegram. He will return shortly.

MADGE. You should not have let him go. Dan Dunn has been roaming about these grounds for two hours. I saw and spoke to him. I never knew him as he is to-night. I cannot control him. He will not obey me. I have tried to lead him home, but he broke from me many times and I have lost him. He will do Mr. Eldridge serious harm should they meet. He will kill him, for he has the strength of a giant. (*To Dolly.*) You should not have let him go.

DOLLY. I tried to prevent his going, but he laughed at my fears.

MADGE. Then you should have gone with him. Others may not know it, but you cannot hide it from me. Mr. Eldridge loves you and you love him. I tried not to believe it, but it is the truth. He will do as you wish. Which way did he go?

DOLLY. The path by the wayside gate. I watched him from that window. (*Pointing to large window.*)

DEAN. All remain here. Mr. Campbell, the women must not be left alone. I will go and meet Frank.

MADGE. No, grandfather. I am the only person Dan will obey. He may listen to me. To you, he will not. Why, I know not, but he hates you only less than he does Mr. Eldridge. You would only add to his frenzy and increase the danger to Mr. Eldridge and yourself.

DOLLY. Madge, I will go with you. You will let me, Madge? I think I have the right to go.

MADGE. Dan saw you and Mr. Eldridge through that window. (*Points to one in rear.*) I had him then, I thought, under control, but that sight maddened him. It was then he broke from me. I have sought him since, but have not found him. Dan will not hurt me, but you would not be safe. (*Runs to door, opens it, exits, and closes door behind her.*)

DEAN. (*Starting to follow Madge.*) I will go with you, Madge.

SALLIE. (*Running in front of him.*) Amos, would you endanger Madge's life, as well as that of Mr. Eldridge? You know that even Dan's parents send for her to control their son when they are powerless to do so. Come, let us go to the dining room. Dan has peered through that window once to-night. Should he do so again, the sight of us here might only infuriate him the more.

CAMPBELL. Mr. Dean, there is much wisdom in Aunt Sallie's suggestion. If anyone is to go, I am the one. Dan does not seem to hate me. Come. (*Takes Mr. Dean's arm and leads him off. All follow except Dolly.*)

DOLLY. I should go mad to sit there inactive. This chimney breast will hide me from anyone looking in through the window. (*Stands at side of chimney.*) No, I must warn Frank at every hazard to myself. (*Feels on mantle.*) Mr. Campbell laid his revolver here after our target practice this afternoon. (*Finds pistol.*) It is loaded, fortunately. I saw the way Frank went. They will not know that I have gone. (*Exit at door...Enter Campbell.*)

CAMPBELL. Miss Dolly! (*Looking around.*) Miss Dolly! She is not here. Certainly she can not have ventured forth in search of Frank. (*Maud peeps in from hall, then runs to Campbell.*)

MAUD. Walter. I had to follow you, I am so frightened. I feel safer when I am with you. Why, where is Dolly?

CAMPBELL. Gone, I fear, to meet Frank. She loves him, Maud. I have no doubt of that now.

MADGE. Nor have I. She accepted Madge's statement of Frank's and her mutual love without denial. She made no effort to hide her

emotion from us. She even claimed her right to go to Frank. Walter, our little comedy will end as we planned it should.

CAMPBELL. Unless it shall prove a tragedy.

MAUD. It is outrageous that the authorities permit this dangerous imbecile to roam at large. Even Mr. Dean now recognizes that Dan is in love with Madge and is madly jealous of all to whom she in anywise shows attention.

CAMPBELL. It is that passion that has made Dan a danger to all at the Cedars. He saw Frank kiss Madge when he was last here. That was the cause of his violent assault on Frank a week ago.

MAUD. This afternoon Mr. Dean kissed Madge in recognition of something she did that pleased her grandfather. That then is the reason Dan now so hates Mr. Dean.

CAMPBELL. Not even you women are safe in showing affection for Madge. Measures must be taken to place that man under proper control immediately. (*Reaches to mantle shelf.*) I put my revolver on this shelf this afternoon. It doesn't seem to be here now. Could Dan have it?

MAUD. No. It was there an hour ago. I touched it when I got one of the candlesticks. We all saw Madge. She didn't take it. It must have been Dolly.

CAMPBELL. She is a capital shot with a pistol. If her nerves are unshaken, she can make a bull's-eye at thirty paces nine times out of ten. Since she would go, I am glad she is well armed. (*Noise of a blow heard, followed by a pistol shot.*) Listen! Only one shot! Maud, I cannot stand this. I will be back in a moment. (*Starts to door. Maud runs and catches his coat tails and clings to them.*)

MAUD. Walter, I am afraid to be left alone! You shall not go! (*Dean and women hurry in.*)

DEAN. I will not skulk here, when Madge may be in danger. (*Exit by door. Campbell tries to follow, but is held by Maud. Eldridge enters, carrying Madge, whose face is smeared with blood, as is the front of her frock. Dean follows supporting Dolly, who carries pistol in her hand. Eldridge kneels on one knee, supporting Madge, whose head rests on his knee.*)

ELDRIDGE. Quick! Some of you bring water! (*Maud exits hastily by hallway.*) She was struggling with Dan. He struck her down in his effort to free himself from her. (*Maud enters with basin and water. Dolly kneels and appears to apply the water to Madge's face. Madge moves with difficulty.*)

MADGE. Mr. Eldridge—is he safe? (*Looks up at Eldridge.*) You are not hurt?

ELDRIDGE. No, I am not hurt, Madge, my child. Tell us of yourself? How is it with you?

MADGE. I am dying. Dan did not mean to hurt me. Miss Dolly, is she here?

DOLLY. I am here, Madge. Don't you know me? (*Takes Madge's hand.*)

MADGE. Yes. Won't you kiss me, Miss Dolly? (*Dolly kisses her.*) I was angry with you a little while ago, but you will not remember that when I am dead. Put your ear near my lips. (*She whispers to Dolly.*) You will promise me that, won't you, Miss Dolly?

DOLLY. I do promise you, Madge, dear, but you are not going to die—you must not die.

MADGE. Grandfather, you have been good to me, even before you knew I was your grandchild. Aunt Sallie has been good to me, also. It will please mother to learn how kind you have been to me.

DEAN. I sinned against your mother, Madge. God help me! My sin has found me, and my punishment is greater than I can bear.

MADGE. (*Speaking with difficulty.*) You have all been good and kind to me. (*Puts her hand in Eldridge's.*) But you, Mr. Eldridge, have been the kindest of all. You were my friend when I had no other friend. I have loved you, I do love you, and I bless you. You will not forget me? (*Falls back in Frank's arms and dies. Sound of storm—noise of wind and dashing of rain against the windows.*)

DOLLY. No one can ever love you, Mr. Eldridge, more than Madge did, for she gave up her life for yours. (*Eldridge, lays Madge in Dean's arms.*)

CAMPBELL. Frank, where is the murderer? (*Lightning flash illuminates the stage. Sound of horses' feet heard, which stop suddenly.*)

ELDRIDGE. He has escaped, I think. Miss Dolly met me as I was returning. As we neared the house, we saw Dan struggling with Madge. She was striving to hold him from attacking me, for he saw us, I imagine, before we saw him. He struck her down in his wild desire to be freed. As he came towards us, Miss Dolly fired. Dan halted and then disappeared in the shrubbery. I brought Madge here in my arms. You know the rest. (*Knock at door. Campbell opens it and one of the neighboring farmers enters.*)

FARMER. Can I get a lantern, Mr. Dean? A dead man is lying in the road. I saw the body by the lightning's flash and halted my team. (*Shoves iron bar.*) I found this near where he lay.

DOLLY. (*Hysterically.*) Great God! My hands are stained with human blood! It is Dan, and I have killed him! (*Totters, then falls into Eldridge's arms as curtain descends.*)

ACT IV.

[*Interval of eight months. Same scene as Act III. Aunt Sallie in mourning, and Dolly seated at table.*]

DOLLY. Aunt Sallie, it is all arranged as I designed. This letter from Mr. Lex informs me that the deed for the Cedars has been executed, and that he will bring it with him this afternoon. To-morrow it will be recorded. You are now the undisputed owner of this house and its contents. No one can molest you in the occupancy of the farm.

SALLIE. It is your generous gift to me. I cannot thank you. I do not know how. Those who had title to the estate at Amos' death were as strangers to me, as indeed they were to him. They had no associations nor love for the old place that has been my home for more than forty years.

DOLLY. You have in addition, Aunt Sallie, the five thousand dollars which came to you by Mr. Dean's will.

SALLIE. That was made four years ago, after Margaret's death. At that time, he was ignorant that he had a granddaughter.

DOLLY. Poor, dear Madge. At her death, the estate of Philip Spencer, amounting to nearly sixty thousand dollars, I am told, was transferred to Mr. Dean by Mr. Eldridge.

SALLIE. But that mattered little to Amos. He never was wholly himself after that dreadful night. His mind became almost a blank.

DOLLY. Did he not remember Madge?

SALLIE. Yes, but all else save her death seemed to have been blot-

ted from his memory. Even his wife's name he was unable to recall, nor Lillian's, but occasionally, I think, he knew Mr. Eldridge.

DOLLY. He remembered Madge, you say?

SALLIE. Her grave was the one link connecting him with his former life. All else was obliterated. I was as a stranger to him. This house, wherein he was born and where he lived for seventy years, was so unfamiliar that he did not know the way from room to room. Yet whenever free to act, he would steal off to the churchyard and remain there by her grave until we led him home.

DOLLY. I received a letter from Mr. Lex in which he merely stated that Mr. Dean was found dead at Madge's grave. I was then in New Orleans.

SALLIE. You see, I had to attend to all the business affairs. I had gone to New York, and left there during the blizzard in January. We were five hours late in reaching the village. When I got home, Amos had been missing since noon.

DOLLY. You knew where to search for him?

SALLIE. Yes. He was found dead on Madge's grave, his body concealed beneath a huge mound of snow.

DOLLY. For the first time, I learn the particulars of his death.

SALLIE. Do you care to recall these sad memories? I avoid them usually.

DOLLY. Let us avoid them now. Maud Forrester—two weeks hence we will know her by another name—and Mr. Campbell will be here shortly. They come to rejoice with the mistress of the Cedars. You don't mind? I asked them to come.

SALLIE. I'm glad you did. Why, I have almost forgotten to tell you that Frank Eldridge—I've known him since he was fourteen—is coming to-day. He is anxious to visit the old place once more. I regret that he is going abroad for so long a time.

DOLLY. (*Startled*). Going abroad? I had not heard that Mr. Eldridge contemplated leaving New York. Have you not been misinformed?

SALLIE. No. Rachel Meadows brought the message from Frank to me. Rachel—you remember her—has come into a nice bit of money lately. A nephew she raised from almost an infant made a lucky strike in Alaska, and left her over twenty thousand dollars. Tom was never robust and the hardships of a mining camp killed the lad.

DOLLY. I am glad he remembered the woman who had been so kind to him when a child.

SALLIE. I shouldn't tell her sisters that. They ain't glad. They were better able to care for the child than she was. Why, the way they abuse Rachel since she got that money is scandalous. You'd think she was a thief who had stolen from them what should have been theirs, and that she should be now in jail. Mr. Eldridge has invested Rachel's means with good judgment. She has now a clever income.

DOLLY. She can trust Mr. Eldridge absolutely.

SALLIE. Rachel is awfully worried about his going away. She never questions anything he advises her to do. She'd put her head into the fire if he told her to. (*Glances out side window.*) Why, here she comes now. (*Rachel passes by window.*) She ran over just because she knows Frank will be here this afternoon. (*Enters Rachel.*)

RACHEL. Howdy do, Sallie. Why, I declare, if it ain't Miss Dolly! (*Shakes hands.*) Things has changed considerable since you was here last.

DOLLY. Aunt Sallie and I were speaking about sad memories. Do not let us recall then now, Miss Rachel.

RACHEL. No. I was a thinkin', Sallie, as I came along, that there are lots of women born that could jest as well been spared. I don't mean old maids like you and me, for we try to make ourselves useful in the world in our way. Now what was the use of that old aunt of Mr. Eldridge's? The one what made that fool will. They tell me she was as rich as cream. Why, she had a nephew that any woman who wasn't a born crank should have been proud of—one what would have done her credit, and she just willed a pile of money to a girl what wasn't a bit of kin to her, instead of givin' it to him.

SALLIE. We, Miss Dolly and I, know all about that will.

RACHEL. Then for her to give Mr. Eldridge a fortune, as she did, provided he'd marry the girl she had set up for life. Why, it was too ridiculous. That's all there are about it. It is too bad. A better man than Frank Eldridge never walked this earth. That's as true as scripture.

DOLLY. Miss Rachel, do you know this girl?

RACHEL. No, and I don't think much of her comin' in the way between Frank and what should have been his'n. I never was married, Miss Dolly, but it wasn't my fault. Nobody never asked me.

DOLLY. That is not so singular. Why, no one has ever asked me.

RACHEL. But your time's acomin'. I guess all the proposals of marriage had run out when it came my turn to draw. But I'll tell you what I've done. I've jest been at 'Squire Smith's office. I had the old man draw up my will, and I left every dollar I have to Frank Eldridge.

SALLIE. You used to say, Rachel, if you had money, you'd do well by Ebenezer Chapel. Of course, you wouldn't leave your sisters anything after the way they've talked about you.

RACHEL. Well, I did think about the Chapel, Sallie. Then I recollected how good and kind Mr. Eldridge was to Madge. He just saved that little girl from—God knows what. Nobody never heard him goin' around shoutin' it out to be talked about. You remember Pat Gorman, him what got killed in the quarry and left a widow and five small children? Yes, you must remember that, Sallie.

SALLIE. I do. It was more than three years ago.

RACHEL. You know Pat's wife—she was a Scotch woman. She often went to church. Well, the parson took up a collection for the family that footed up a little over twenty-two dollars. The parson, he spoke about the large amount what had been raised, in his next Sunday's sermon; then the committee what took the money to the poor widow made a long winded report, which was read by the parson to the congregation; then in the annual report the whole thing was told over again. You remember it was published in the "Village Sentinel."

SALLIE. Yes, I read it.

RACHEL. Well, when I thought about that I jest concluded that I would leave the charity end of my business with Mr. Eldridge, as I did my other affairs. By the way, Miss Dolly, don't you know I made up my mind jest fall that Frank was gone on you. Yes, and that you were gone on him. Now I know what I'm talkin' about, and as sure as we're livin', you couldn't do better if you searched the wide world over.

DOLLY. You must not talk that way about Mr. Eldridge and me, Miss Rachel. He might hear it. It would be unpleasant to him, and if he were to learn that I was present when it was said, it might reflect upon me. I want to hold Mr. Eldridge's esteem at least.

RACHEL. I'll never say nothin' about it if it will worry him. But I've a kind of notion that Mr. Eldridge is vastly disappointed about

some thin'. It jest struck me, Miss Dolly, when I seed you, that maybe it was you who hadn't treated that young man exactly right.

DOLLY. What right have I to think that Mr. Eldridge cares anything for me? You both know that my hands are stained with human blood.

SALLIE. What is that? I didn't imagine that such a thought shadowed your life. I know that Frank believes now, as he did that night, that twice within a week you had saved his life. Miss Dolly, indeed you have nothing to regret in that brave act.

RACHEL. I'm only a plain, country bred, single woman, but I reckon that men and women are much alike everywhere, no matter where you find them. Suppose'n Frank Eldridge had killed a man to save your life, if you loved him before, you'd love him the more, after he'd done that for you, wouldn't you? Now jest change places with him.

DOLLY. But Mr. Eldridge does not love me.

RACHEL. I don't know for sure now, but if he didn't last fall, I'm a Methodist, and everybody who knows Rachel Meadows will tell you I'm a hard-shell Baptist, and sot in my ways.

DOLLY. I'm—well—I'll go to my room. I'll not be long absent. (*Ascends stair. Rachel and Sallie look after her.*)

SALLIE. She will be the better of a good cry, Rachel. Like you, I thought she was in love with Frank last fall. That, I thought, would make a happy marriage.

RACHEL. Well, I never did have no experience myself in love matters, so my opinion ain't of no account. But you had, Sallie, and I expect you knows. (*Maud and Campbell pass by window.*)

SALLIE. Don't say anything about this. Miss Maud and Campbell are here. (*Enter Maud and Walter. Maud carries flowers.*)

MAUD. How are you both? (*Kisses, then Campbell shakes hands.*) We are so glad to be here, to congratulate you both on your luck. You see, Miss Rachel, we are not ignorant of your good fortune.

CAMPBELL. In both cases, so justly merited.

RACHEL. Mine would have been better if Tom had lived and got home. But where is Mr. Eldridge?

SALLIE. Yes, Mr. Campbell, where is Frank? Was he not on your train?

CAMPBELL. Yes. Mr. Lex and he are following us. They stopped at Squire Smith's for a moment, so Maud and I took the short cut by the wayside gate.

MAUD. Where is Dolly? She was surely coming?

SALLIE. She is now in her room. I will tell her you are here.

MAUD. No, I will go with you. (*Gives flowers to Campbell.*)

CAMPBELL. I can lay these on Madge's grave while you are with Dolly.

RACHEL. If Mr. Campbell don't mind, I will go with him.

MAUD. I'll not be jealous. You two won't talk of anybody but Frank.

RACHEL. I reckon that's nigh the truth.

CAMPBELL. Miss Rachel, I am at your command. (*Offers arm, and Rachel and Campbell exit.*)

MAUD. Aunt Sallie, I have learned something that makes me want to give Dolly a piece of my mind. Why, that girl would be the better of a good shaking.

SALLIE. She's a dear, sweet woman. That's what she is. Come, Miss Maud. (*Sallie and Maud exit by hall and stairs. Eldridge and Mr. Lex enter.*)

LEX. This is the first opportunity I have had in some time to allude to your Aunt Eleanor's will. In two months, Eleanor DeCourcy will be of age. If the conditions governing the bequest to you are not complied with shortly, you will be shut out by limitation from any participation in the estate.

ELDRIDGE. It is a matter of indifference to me. The bequest, so far as I am concerned, will assuredly lapse.

LEX. You do not propose, Frank, to forfeit that princely inheritance?

ELDRIDGE. I cannot forfeit what I never had. There are really two conditions.

LEX. Two conditions

ELDRIDGE. Yes. Miss DeCourcy's consent and mine to the marriage. Now, as I never saw Miss DeCourcy, and certainly, as I am totally unknown to her, there is little likelihood that those conditions will be fulfilled.

LEX. Then I have been misinformed. I understood that you and she had not only met but that you were much interested in each other.

ELDRIDGE. The error is not difficult to explain. I have met a Miss DeCourcy, but it was Dolly not Eleanor. There is, I think, a close relationship between the two.

LEX. Oh, that is it. Well, this Dolly, what of her?

ELDRIDGE. You were an intimate friend of my parents, and are still so to me. Hence, I do not hesitate to tell you, Mr. Lex, that I am exceedingly pleased with Dolly DeCourcy. I would esteem myself fortunate could I win her for my wife. At one time, I believed she was pleased with my attentions. Since Madge's murder she has avoided me.

LEX. I infer then that you are in love with Dolly?

ELDRIDGE. Yes.

LEX. And would gladly make her your wife?

ELDRIDGE. Yes. I do love her. She is so dear to me that I could not contemplate marriage with any woman other than Dolly. You now know why the condition in Aunt Eleanor's will is impossible of fulfillment.

LEX. That is to say that you, Frank Eldridge, are so enamoured of the wrong Miss DeCourcy that you are determined to forfeit a half million dollars because of your love for her?

ELDRIDGE. You can state it that way if you like.

LEX. Haven't you proposed marriage to Dolly? Of course you haven't. When a bright, whole-souled, thoroughly good fellow is determined to make an ass of himself, there is no end to the blunders he will commit.

ELDRIDGE. You are complimentary. I was not a part of Aunt Eleanor's estate that she could dispose of me as it pleased her.

LEX. You are paying a high price for this girl's love, as you will have it that way. Take my advice, Frank, as a friend? On the first opportunity, tell Dolly you love her and ask her to be your wife.

ELDRIDGE. Take this cigar, Mr. Lex. (*Hands him one.*) Come, sit with me on the porch. I have a matter of important business which I wish to submit to you, and upon which I desire your professional opinion. The associations connected with this apartment are of a nature that might distract somewhat my thoughts from the details of this business. (*Exit Frank and Lex. Maud and Dolly descend stair and enter.*)

MAUD. Dolly, you are absolutely absurd. You cannot be ignorant of Frank's love for you.

DOLLY. He has never told me that he loved me.

MAUD. You never gave him the chance. You are sufficiently a woman of the world to know that no man ever proposed unless the girl made the opportunity for him to speak of that love.

DOLLY. I would permit no one but you to take me thus to task.

MAUD. I feel like giving you a good shaking. You are endangering your whole future. Worse than that, you are denying to Frank that happiness he so richly deserves. I came near losing Walter through my absurd jealousy. The merest chance saved me from my foolish act. If I can prevent it, you shall not wreck your life, and Frank's, as well.

DOLLY. You have no right to talk so to me. I will not permit it.

MAUD. Then answer this one question: Do you love Frank Eldridge? If your reply is in the negative, I will never mention this subject to you again.

DOLLY. You have no right. It is impertinent, unwomanly, to ask me that.

MAUD. Notwithstanding that I have no right, that I am impertinent and unwomanly in so doing, I still press the question.

DOLLY. But suppose I—

MAUD. Is it yes or no?

DOLLY. You won't listen to me—there is an impediment—

MAUD. You are not a married woman?

DOLLY. No. You know that I am not.

MAUD. You are not the promised wife of another man?

DOLLY. No. I will not listen to you further.

MAUD. There are no ties of consanguinity between Frank and you that would make a marriage incestuous?

DOLLY. No. Not that. But Maud, you surely cannot forget the love Madge gave to him? A love so wholly unselfish that she sacrificed her life that his might be saved.

MAUD. You jealous of the dead! Jealous of a child's love for the man who acted in a parent's stead to her?

DOLLY. But there is blood upon my hand.

MAUD. Yes, shed for the man you love, in the protection of his life as well as your own. Go back to that night. Under the like conditions presented then, would you do other than you did? It was Frank's life or that mad man's—your own life or Dan's. I envy you that deed. You are simply striving to find a reason that may justify you in the wrong you are doing Frank and yourself.

DOLLY. It is false. I will not listen to you. Leave me!

MAUD. (*Aside.*) Yes, to meditation on what I have said. It was heroic treatment, but the malady would yield to naught else. (*Exit by hall.*)

DOLLY. (*Pacing the stage.*) It was infamous. It was brutal in Maud. I jealous of gentle, loving Madge. It is a base lie. (*Pauses as if in thought.*) No. It is the truth. God pity me, it is the truth! It is I that am a lie. Not one of all here, save Mr. Lex, knows me, for what I am. At my own suggestion, I sought the Cedars, coming with the one purpose of winning the love of Frank Eldridge. I know now that that was my real motive. Like a curse, I have fallen across his path in life. I have robbed him of his inheritance. What other wrong will come to him through me, God only knows! (*Throws herself on window seat. Enter Eldridge and Campbell.*)

CAMPBELL. You have decided? When do you sail?

ELDRIDGE. Exactly three weeks from to-day.

CAMPBELL. Of course, you know where you will be stationed and how long you will be absent?

ELDRIDGE. My headquarters will be in London, and I will probably not return to America for two years, at least. I am to represent a large manufacturing syndicate, which will make London its European distributing centre.

CAMPBELL. You had not this move in contemplation two weeks ago, or you would have told me. I returned from Washington this morning and learned of your intention to go abroad less than half an hour ago from Miss Rachel.

ELDRIDGE. To be honest with you, Walter, I want to get away from New York, to get away from myself, if that were possible.

CAMPBELL. You have not been yourself since the murder. You have nothing to reproach yourself with because of that frightful incident.

ELDRIDGE. Poor, little Madge. She loved me with that affection she would have held for her father, had he lived and she had known him. Sometimes I think, Walter, that she and mother were the only women who loved me, or will ever love me.

CAMPBELL. I thought at one time, Frank, that Dolly loved you.

ELDRIDGE. I hoped so once. But—well, I was flattered by her kindness, which I mistook for a sentiment that I have failed to arouse in her.

CAMPBELL. Damn it, old fellow, it is too bad. It is that sentiment you long for that is clouding your life. She has trifled with you, played the coquette, wounded your heart, and made your life wretched. Damn such women.

ELDRIDGE. I will not hear a word in reproach of Miss DeCourcy. Twice she saved my life. While I doubt whether it was worth the saving, at all events, she saved it. I love that woman, and, Walter, I will quarrel with my best friend if he shall intimate anything that casts a doubt upon her truthfulness or calls in question any act of hers.

CAMPBELL. I cannot doubt your love for that girl. Nor will I quarrel with you. I shall respect your wishes. By the way, what about Miss Eleanor DeCourcy?

ELDRIDGE. I shall not be in America when the limitation in my Aunt's will expires. Time will end that miserable affair.

CAMPBELL. As we came in I saw Mr. Lex, Maud and Aunt Sal lie in the meadow field. I propose to join them. I am glad, old fellow, that you will remain for our wedding. In the spring, it is probable that I will have business that will take me to London. The Madam and I will assuredly look you up.

ELDRIDGE. I'd be offended if you did not. (*Exit Campbell.*) Thank heaven! Maud and Walter are happy, and they deserve happiness. (*About to follow Campbell, when Dolly rises and, evidently embarrassed, approaches Eldridge.*)

DOLLY. Mr. Eldridge—one moment.

ELDRIDGE. Miss Dolly. (*Extends his hand.*) I did not know that you were here.

DOLLY. You are going abroad. You must not go in ignorance of the deception I have practiced towards you. I did not design to mislead you, but your mistake gave me the opportunity, and I permitted you to continue in your error, making no attempt to undeceive you.

ELDRIDGE. Do not accuse yourself of any wrong to me.

DOLLY. You shall hear the naked truth, should it even earn for me your contempt.

ELDRIDGE. You are overwrought now. Defer this matter for the present.

DOLLY. I have masqueraded before you and this household long enough. You and they are ignorant of my true personality.

ELDRIDGE. You are not a married woman?

DOLLY. No. But I am Eleanor DeCourcy, the girl who came between you and your Aunt; who robbed you of your birthright. Dolly was Miss Lloyd's pet name for me, and gradually others adopted it until only in legal documents was I known as Eleanor.

ELDRIDGE. I have never accused you of wrong, either as Dolly or Eleanor DeCourcy.

DOLLY. No. You found justification, not reproaches, for your Aunt's liberality to me. On my honor, I had no knowledge of the provision in her will making your inheritance contingent upon my marriage to you. Mr. Lex, after the will was read, told me of that condition. I never in my life spoke to your Aunt about the disposition of her property.

ELDRIDGE. I accepted the disposition Aunt made of her estate, and would not even now change it, only in that I regret she did not bequeath to you absolutely all she had. I think there is nothing that needs explanation.

DOLLY. You must listen to me. I shall conceal nothing from you. (*Heeds.*) I am so unhappy.

ELDRIDGE. Then tell me briefly. (*Aside.*) It is best for her.

DOLLY. When I visited the Cedars last fall, it was with the one purpose of meeting you, Mr. Eldridge. I came that I might suggest your acceptance of nine-tenths of the estate your Aunt had willed to me. Our first meeting was accidental. When you told me who you were, without thought, I used the pet name your Aunt had given me, forgetful that it would not reveal to you that I was Eleanor DeCourcy. When I saw the mistake into which you had fallen by reason of the names, partly in jest I let you remain ignorant of my individuality. I have permitted that error to continue until now. Your gentleness and consideration for the woman who had unwittingly done harm to you; pleased yet annoyed me at first. Afterwards I refrained from disclosing the truth, fearing that my confession might forfeit for me your respect.

ELDRIDGE. It could not do that. While Frank Eldridge lives he will remain your debtor for the happiest hours that have come into his life.

DOLLY. I am not wholly dependent upon Miss Lloyd's bequest for my maintenance. From my grandparents I received twenty thousand dollars. I want you, Mr. Eldridge, to promise me that when I am of age you will accept a transfer of everything I am entitled to receive by your Aunt's will.

ELDRIDGE. You once before proposed to renounce your rights under that will. This is the same proposition in another form. Why should I change my resolution now?

DOLLY. Because I want you to. Because I—

ELDRIDGE. I cannot promise that.

DOLLY. Then you will share it with me?

ELDRIDGE. (*Coming close to her.*) Share it with you? There is but one way I could share it with you.

DOLLY. And that is?

ELDRIDGE. If I were your husband. It is not the money I want, Dolly. It is you—you, I crave. I have loved you from the moment when we met near the old stile in the woods, the day you saved me

from Dan's first murderous attempt upon my life. Will you give yourself to me? (*Attempts to take her hand.*) Will you, Dolly?

DOLLY. I did not, indeed I did not, anticipate this.

ELDRIDGE. I was mad to say what I did—to hope that you could ever love me. Forget my words, as if they had never been uttered. Forget that I have ever crossed your path, or given you an hour's uneasiness. (*Paces stage. Looks at watch.*) Miss DeCourcy, I have barely time in which to catch the Southbound train for New York. Say to these people that I was so hurriedly called away that I could not apprise them of my departure. Good-by, Miss DeCourcy. I regret that I have done aught to annoy you. (*Holds out hand, which Dolly appears not to notice.*) Good-by. (*Picks up hat and walks to door.*)

DOLLY. (*Extending her hand in entreaty.*) Do not go. You must not go. Frank, I shall die if you turn from me now. (*Eldridge embraces her.*)

ELDRIDGE. You do love me, Dolly?

DOLLY. Yes. Never, I think, has woman loved man more disinterestedly, more wholly than I love you.

ELDRIDGE. And you will be my wife?

DOLLY. Yes. (*He kisses her.*) Do not despise me, Frank, when I confess that I was jealous of Madge's love for you.

ELDRIDGE. If she were here now, no one would rejoice more in my happiness than Madge.

DOLLY. Frank, I think it was envy more than jealousy, for Madge filled the full measure of the apostles' test of love in that she laid down her life for yours. Yet, Frank, when Madge was dying, her last whispered words to me were to care for you, to love you, to be your wife. I promised her, and yet because she had sacrificed more for you than I could I was jealous of that dear girl's love for you. It was wicked in me. (*He pets her. Enters Maud, Campbell, Aunt Sallie, Rachel and Mr. Lex.*)

MR. LEX. Well, Frank, how's this? You assured me you did not know Eleanor DeCourcy. Yet I find you conversing with her as though you and she were most excellent friends.

DOLLY. But Frank did not know, Mr. Lex, until a moment ago that Eleanor and Dolly DeCourcy were the same individual.

MAUD and CAMPBELL. You Eleanor DeCourcy?

ELDRIDGE. And what is more, Mr. Lex, in order to prevent future uncertainties as to the dual Misses DeCourcy, this young lady has consented to become Mrs. Frank Eldridge.

MAUD. Walter, we shall succeed in marrying Dolly DeCourcy to Frank Eldridge. (*To Dolly.*) I suppose I will now have to forego the good shaking you so well deserved?

CAMPBELL. You both know how glad I am that the vexatious will question has at length reached such a happy solution.

DOLLY. Frank and I have reached this solution: We have decided that the estate left to me by dear Aunt Eleanor shall be divided equally between us.

AUNT SALLIE. But the other half million—will that go to the insane asylum?

DOLLY. I suppose so.

RACHEL. Well, now, I declare. That's just too bad. Mr. Lex, ain't you lawyer enough to circumvent that.

LEX. That depends. Frank, you still propose to go abroad?

ELDRIDGE. I have accepted the trust, and I must stand to my agreement.

LEX. And you, Eleanor? Is Frank to go alone to encounter the temptations and allurements of London?

DOLLY. No—that is—Frank must decide for me.

LEX. Well, Miss Rachel, if Frank Eldridge and Eleanor DeCourcy become man and wife at any time within the next two months the condition of Miss Lloyd's bequest to Frank will be fulfilled, and the half-million will be Frank's. Otherwise, the trustees of the asylum, named in the will, will receive certainly a snug sum of money.

ELDRIDGE. But Dolly must decide. I, Frank Lloyd Eldridge, am prepared to meet the conditions upon which my share in Aunt Eleanor's estate depends.

ALL. (*Save Frank.*) It is up to you, Dolly.

DOLLY. Well, under the circumstances, if I must decide: Three weeks hence there will be no Dolly nor Eleanor DeCourcy—but—but—(*gives her hands to Eldridge*)—all correspondence addressed to either of those ladies will receive due attention from Mrs. Eleanor Eldridge. (*Curtain falls.*)

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